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NSC BRIEFING

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SPUTNIK (POLITICAL)

I. Soviets appear well satisfied with impact produced thus far by ICBM and Sputniks. They may believe that no further demonstrations of technological advances at this time, except a successful effort to reach the moon by rocket, are likely to rival the combined impact of ICBM and two earth satellites.

A. Soviet leaders have exhibited considerable adroitness and restraint in seeking to translate scientific achievements into political gains and have stopped short of open intimidation of the free world.

1. They are confident that impact has already produced important political consequences favorable to Soviet aims: increased interest in new Summit talks prior to final decisions regarding stationing of US missiles and nuclear weapons stockpiles in NATO countries; increased interest in schemes pointing toward neutralism and disengagement.

2. Soviets may see little political advantage in launching more satellites of same type as first two. They may plan to defer orbiting of vehicle of improved and heavier design until, or just before, US launches its first satellite. Khrushchev told that "if necessary, we can double the weight" of second sputnik.

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II. In public statements, Khrushchev has taken line that Soviet satellite program is progressing according to plan, that USSR has mastered all technical problems. He has implied, at least, that further launchings will be postponed until results of first two sputniks have been thoroughly studied.

B. Same line taken by Bulganin [redacted]

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[redacted] although one side or the other
might gain a temporary lead in some particular field,
this would not change the basic situation.

IV. Soviet leaders are confident they have established a commanding
lead in missile race and that West will have great difficulty
overcoming this advantage.

A. Soviet propaganda exploitation of ICBM and sputniks portrayed
USSR as world leader in missile field, leaving US in position
of catching up in science and technology.

1. Khrushchev told Supreme Soviet on 6 November: "Our
country's achievement is of great importance because
we win time in the competition with capitalist countries."
2. He told [redacted] : "USSR's lead in missile
race gives us the possibility to improve the production
of rockets, to lead the US in this matter, and to
accumulate the necessary stock of rockets if we do not
come to terms on disarmament."

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